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ABSTRACT

Recent statistics indicate an increase in the rate of teen pregnancy and parenthood, which in turn indicates a need for increasing services at school sites. The younger the teen is at the time of the first pregnancy, the greater the likelihood that she will drop out of high school due to the barriers of child care, family dysfunctions, and lack of trust. To prevent dropout, school districts must look at ways to provide necessary support services to prevent a breakdown in the learning cycle. One such example of a school providing these comprehensive services is Nueva Vista High School in Santa Rosa, California. The school provides child care and has onsite community support agencies, such as Women Infant and Children (WIC) workers, social workers, and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) career counselors. In the past 7 years of this program, 66 students have received a diploma, [General Equivalency Diploma] (GED), or California Proficiency. By providing support services to students, the program has significantly increased the average daily attendance of the district, improving not only the lives of the individual women but the local community as a whole. (Contains nine references.) (JE)

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THE VALUE OF SUPPORT AGENCIES ON THE SCHOOL SITE TO PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS

by
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THE VALUE OF SUPPORT AGENCIES ON THE SCHOOL SITE TO PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS

Our world is becoming a complicated, stressful place to live and raise a family. Parents want to provide the best environment for their children to grow; however, many adults are overwhelmed with trying to deal with drugs, crime, and safety issues. They often don't have the energy, time, and persistence needed to provide a positive environment for their children. In addition, educators, who have been nurturers in our society for generations, are finding it more difficult to cope with the demands of their students.

Providing comprehensive support services at the school site is vital to the success of today's students, because most young adults find school to be their safest environment. Pragmatically, there is no better place to introduce students to community services outside of the educational world than at school. Such services can include child care, case management, career counseling, and individual counseling.

In California Senate Bill 620, the Healthy Start Initiative, school districts have the opportunity to work with community agencies to provide support services to students and their families on site. Districts have found that agencies are willing to relocate current staff to school sites. This move requires only a work space, a phone, and access to the students. (Richtsmeier, Congressional Testimony, 1993)

The Way It Is

Recent statistics indicate an increase in the rate of teen pregnancy and parenthood which in turn indicates a need for increasing services at school sites. The following statistics support this need:

- Approximately 485 teenage women in California become pregnant daily (Henshaw, 1993).

- Approximately 194 births, 229 abortions and 62 miscarriages daily for young women 19 years old and younger (Brindis, and Kroenbrot, 1989).

- In 1990, a teen gave birth in California approximately every seven and one half minutes (Department of Health Statistics- DHS, 1992).

- One in five adolescent births represents a repeat birth during the teenage years (Brindis, 1988).

- The increase in teen births is particularly found in the 16 years and younger category (DHS, 1988).

- One in five teen parents comes from varied ethnic groups with low socio-economic status and with low academic basic skills (Children's Defense Fund-CDF, 1987).

According to the California State Board of education's policy statement in July of 1993 on pregnant and parenting students, the younger the teen is at the time of the first pregnancy, the greater the likelihood that she will drop out of high school due to the barriers of childcare, family dysfunctions, lack of vision, and lack of trust. To prevent this school districts must look at ways to provide necessary support services to prevent a break down in the learning cycle.

In Santa Rosa, California, the number of births to teenage mothers, including 19 year olds, living in the zip code areas of 95401-95409 that

feed into the Santa Rosa City Schools District from 1989 to 1993 are as follows (DHS, '89-'93):

'93	'92	'91	'90	'89	
6	8	6	4	4	14 years old and under
18	19	11	9	10	15 years old
32	20	28	22	22	16 years old
41	39	35	39	35	17 years old
83	72	70	69	69	18 years old
99	86	93	101	108	19 year olds
279	244	243	242	246	total

The above statistics show that in Santa Rosa the birth rate numbers were stable until 1993 when a significant increase in births to mothers of ages 16, 18, and 19 years old occurred. These statistics reflect a national trend of more births to teenage mothers and a younger age at time of delivery.

Barriers to an Education

> In mid October of 1994, Judy, a fourteen year old eighth grade student in her first trimester of pregnancy attempts to enroll in a comprehensive junior high school. She had missed seven weeks of school because of serious bouts of morning sickness. Judy is told that she cannot register and must go somewhere else.

Federal Title IX guarantees every student the right to participate in any program of his or her choice. However, across the country, students

are regularly denied this right because of pregnancy.

It is important to our society to educate the increasing population of pregnant and parenting teens. Teens can be self-sufficient in the future and not be life-long welfare recipients if they can obtain necessary schooling. How this education is delivered can be an effective coordinated collaboration for the students, district and community agencies.

To successfully accomplish the above goals, necessary support services to pregnant and parenting teens are vital. These teens need to stay in school since education is their primary hope for becoming self-sufficient. The major barriers that prevent teen parents from being successful in mainstream high schools or vocational training centers are psycho-social issues including family dysfunction, lack of career vision, lack of trust and child care (Oman, 1992).

Tremendous **psycho-social issues** face teen parents trying to cope in their personal and family lives. These factors frequently include unstable housing, interpersonal conflicts with parents and partners, inadequate finances, insufficient food, lack of child support, custody conflicts, and lack of transportation (Oman, 1992).

Family dysfunction inhibits feelings of self-worth because the

family unit lacks communication skills and consistent guidance. Parents often have unrealistic expectations for their teen. Many teen parents have family members with addictive behaviors that promote situations of role reversal. Teens from these families are most often the responsible family member in charge of taking care of the others.

Another barrier for pregnant and parenting teens is their own **lack of vision** of what is possible for them in the work world because they have never experienced successful employment. This lack of vision impedes their pursuit of an education which is vital for a successful future. Many teen parents don't have contact with role models who have careers and are effective parents. This gives teens the view that being a parent is the only skill they have, thus causing them to depend on tax supported welfare programs, which leads to a life of poverty and low self worth.

Finally the major need for pregnant and parenting teens who want to go to school or training is **childcare**. Unfortunately, many teen mothers have been abused or neglected themselves and **will not trust** child care providers outside of their families. This is unusual considering that most abuse is done by family members or close family friends. If the teen can be convinced of the value of licensed facilities or home providers, then

lack of funds to pay for the childcare becomes the problem. In either case, education is interrupted, and reentering the educational world at a later date becomes difficult due to feelings of failure and of being a drop out.

Chronology of Agency Support at Nueva Vista

Even though needs of pregnant and parenting students are great, it is important to realize that all needed services do not have to be in place to start a program. There are many excellent programs across the nation that have been in existence fifteen years or more, but they all didn't start with what they have today. It is acceptable to start with basic educational needs and build supplementary support services as the needs and opportunity arise.

A brief history of Santa Rosa City School District program that primarily serves pregnant and parenting teens is as follows:

> In October of 1987 a program for pregnant and parenting students in Santa Rosa, California was created. Curriculum in all subjects required for graduation plus parenting was developed at multiple ability levels. Twelve students were enrolled, and attended Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 2-5 p.m at the local continuation high school. Two days were spent on academics with ten hours of independent at-home study work assigned weekly. The third day was committed to information on community agency resources and group counseling. After seven months, a review of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and a discussion of students' needs determined that the

independent study work should be eliminated, and students should attend five days a week. Child care and career counseling were determined as needs to be filled in the future.

Students started attending five days a week in September 1988. The following February the program moved into its own classroom at the Adult Education site. Playpens, walkers, and a couch were added to the classroom, so that babies and toddlers could be brought to school. In June a federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) grant was approved which provided child care and tutorial instructional assistants, a career counselor, and a case manager for crisis intervention.

In September 1989 school started with twenty students and twelve babies coming five hours a day. A child care area was created with volunteer labor and materials, and donations were received for infant equipment and supplies, as well as laundry detergent, toys, and other necessary childcare items.

In September 1990, the JTPA grant allowed $26,000 for case management and career counseling. During this school year, the District added a second section of students.

The 1991-92 school year saw the loss of the career counselor due to lack of funds. In the spring many community agencies worked together to write a SB 620 Healthy Start Grant to provide additional support services to students and their families at the school site. Greater Avenues toward Independence Now (GAIN), Women Infant and Children (WIC), and a private psychologist offered their services even without the grant. All of these services meant that the students stayed in school to receive vital support services.

In September 1992, a third section was offered. The Private Industry Council (PIC) from JTPA funding, brought back the career counselor whose value had already been documented. A Small Necessary High School application was written. The State Department of Education in October of 1993, approved the application which provided a stable source of funding

which paid for additional district staff. The district also provided a portable office building for the program and support staff.

A School with On-Site Support Agencies

At Nueva Vista High School, educators provide a broader conception of education than traditional models. Below describes a typical day:

> The 20' by 30' classroom has 18 young men and women this particular morning, sitting around five long tables. Cushioned chairs offer comfort for the students many of whom are pregnant or in postpartum recovery. Students are working on assignments and/or projects that suit their grade, graduation needs, and ability. Babies can be heard in the childcare lab on the other side of the wall partition. On the chalkboard, are 16 names of students who need to see the WIC personnel for food or baby formula vouchers.
>
> In the adjoining office three workers from WIC work with their newly installed data retrieval system that connects them to the state headquarters in Sacramento.
>
> During the morning, GAIN case manager helps Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) students complete forms for childcare and transportation money. The Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) case manager helps students resolve obstacles that may prevent them from achieving their future goals. The JTPA career counselor is getting information from students who are interested in working on pre employment skills and career research with JTPA.

Some teachers would look at all of this activity as a distraction in a learning environment. But at Nueva Vista, it is viewed as a gift. Having child care and community support agencies on the school site provides the necessary support for pregnant and parenting teens to stay in school and

graduate. The school district benefits economically from the positive Average Daily Attendance (ADA) which is paid for each student in school. Community agencies benefit because their clients are centrally located and easily accessible. The students benefit from easy access to these agencies without having to deal with childcare and transportation problems. This is a win-win situation for all parties involved: the school, the students, and the agencies.

At this time, Nueva Vista is set up for 65 students and 26 babies. The district staff includes 4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) certificated, teaching/counseling staff and 2 FTE classified, instructional assistants and secretarial staff. Support agency staff includes .75 FTE case managers from AFLP, 1.75 FTE career counselors from PIC/JTPA, approximately 10 hours a month from WIC and from a private psychologist. The agency support positions are paid for by each agency with approximately $100,000 in support service benefits provided to Nueva Vista high school students at the school site during the 1993-94 school year.

Implications

Nationally 80% of teen mothers never finish high school or get their GED (Brandis, 1988). Pregnancy or parenting is the number one reason

cited by females for dropping out of school. These statistics seem very bleak, but due to program agency support, many young Santa Rosa parents have been able to finish their education, get pre-employment training, and support themselves and their children. Sixty-six students have received a diploma, GED, or California Proficiency in the past seven years of this program. Of these sixty-six students, fifty-one would have dropped out of school if they had followed the trend indicated by the national statistics.

Reversing the trend of school has been effective at Nueva Vista High School for these sixty-six teens. Below is the break down of students who have completed the program by school year, method of completion and yearly ADA. ADA has shown a steady increase through the years as we improved support services and increased the number of students served:

School Year	ADA	Diploma	GED	Proficiency	Total Completers
1987-88	9.60	1			1
1988-89	12.30	3			3
1989-90	20.19	8	4		12
1990-91	32.61	8	2		10
1991-92	38.87	7	4	1	12
1992-93	51.23	12	2	1	15
1993-94	54.35	10	1	2	13

Single parent families headed by women are at the greatest risk of being poor (Brandis, 1988). Approximately 80% Nueva Vista High School

completers are self sufficient and not dependent on AFDC. The Center For Population Statistics estimates that over the next 20 years, society will have to pay $16 billion to support first-born infants of teenagers (Hahn, 1987). Programs like Nueva Vista's can change the trend of AFDC dependency.

By providing support services to our students, we have increased our ADA for the district. We have been able to make our school site a place where students can come to solve their problems, not a place that adds more problems to their already overwhelming lives.

For generations our society and educational institutions have considered pregnant and parenting female students as throwaway students. They have been given little consideration or encouragement to stay in school, and for many generations they were not allowed to attend. For many without family support, they were sentenced to life on AFDC or, at best, minimum wage jobs to support their families. Their dreams of college and good jobs were lost forever.

Since dysfunctional families are cyclical, the only way to stop the cycle is to work with young parents who have come from dysfunctional families, and educate and train them in new ways to face life's problems. It is important to instill in these young parents some positive parenting

and decision making skills. Only through education and training can people change the cycle of dysfunction from which they have come.

Here are two examples of students who will no longer be dependent on the social welfare economic system:

> Anna first came to us seven years ago as a pregnant 12 year old. After a year's absence from school after the baby was born. She was encouraged to stay home to care for all of the family's younger children. She struggled to convince her family that she needed to be in school. After attending Nueva vista with its support services, she now has only 15 of 220 credits remaining for graduation requirements. In addition, Anna will be the first member of her family to receive a high school diploma. Due to her summer work program under the guidence of Junior Acheivement at a local computer company, she has over $1000 worth of scholarships waiting for her at the local junior college. Her dream is to become a nurse, and she will be a wonderful one!

> Jamie, a seventeen year old, senior, single parent with a sixteen month old son gave the following statement at a field hearing on the reauthorization of the Elementary/Secondary Education Act in October of 1993 on the importance of comprehensive support services on the school site:
>
> > "If these support services were not available at my school site, I would have dropped out of school around my eighth month of pregnancy. By attending this school, I was able to continue my education, and even graduate early because I could bring my baby to school with me and take advantage of all of the services offered."
>
> This statement is especially important when you realize Jamie did this after being kicked out of her home and

forced to become an emancipated minor at age fifteen. Currently she is attending junior college, preparing for a career in sales.

These young women show that by having access to the necessary support services on the school site, they and other pregnant and parenting teens have continued their education without interruption. Teen pregnancy will always be a part of our society. We can no longer ignore this population. Community's must recognize the potential of these pregnant and parenting students. Society in general must do all that it can to help these students become productive citizens and effective parents. With appropriate community support and acceptance, everyone benefits due to happy healthy children being raised by productive parents not dependent on the welfare system.

Appendix

List of acroynems used:

DHS- Department of Health Services
CDF- Children's Defense Fund
AFDC- Aid to Families with Dependent Children
ADA- Average Daily Attendence
JTPA- Job Training Partnership Act
GAIN- Greater Avenues toward Independence Now
WIC- Women Infant and Children
PIC- Private Industry Counsel
AFLP- Adolescent Family Life Programs

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